



INL's Cal Ozaki recently served as liaison to DOE's Office of Nuclear Energy (DOE-NE), the first investment in sending an INL technical expert to work with D.C.'s senior DOE officials.

## INL employee brings Washington, D.C., relationships, experiences back to Idaho

by [Jo Seely](#), *Nuclear Science & Technology communications intern*

He's not technically a diplomat or ambassador, but Idaho National Laboratory's Cal Ozaki is working to bridge the communication gaps between two different cultures.

The senior INL adviser spent the last 18 months living, working, teaching and learning in Washington, D.C., as the INL liaison to the [Department of Energy's Office of Nuclear Energy](#) (DOE-NE). Since returning, Ozaki has made it his mission to teach INL employees about the workings of Washington, D.C., and how to better interact with colleagues at DOE.

For more than 25 years, Ozaki and his wife Cindy had wanted to take an assignment like this. He had traveled to Washington throughout his career, but after this 18-month stay, Ozaki said, "It's a whole different experience living in Washington rather than just flying in and out for meetings."

Ozaki was given the unique opportunity to participate and contribute to work that goes into leading the DOE's Nuclear Energy Programs. Senior DOE-NE and laboratory managers believe that exchanging personnel will help improve communications between the two organizations. The position of INL liaison for DOE-NE was the first investment in sending an INL technical expert to work with senior DOE officials in Washington. As liaison, Ozaki became an asset to INL as he participated and contributed to the work that goes into leading the DOE's Nuclear Energy Programs.

"This isn't Idaho — the business in D.C. is very different," said Ozaki. "There are different pressures and demands, different things that drive the work. Seeing things firsthand allows me to explain why the people in Washington do what they do and how we can best help. Were I not there, it would be very difficult to appreciate what drives program people in Washington. "

Ozaki explained that the majority of the work at DOE-NE is focused on gathering and analyzing information that supports budget formulation and execution. At any one point in time, Ozaki said, three budgets are being worked concurrently, involving the integrated portfolio of Nuclear Energy programs. All program managers are involved as they try to address the priorities of the president and comply with congressional direction.

"There is never enough time or resources to do all that needs to be done; so many tradeoffs and decisions must be made using whatever information exists at a point in time," said Ozaki. "Making the right choices requires a great deal of experience and fortitude because the issues are always multidimensional and the consequences of making the wrong decision can be devastating to the program."

This is where Ozaki plays a role.

"Providing solid, complete and timely information is key," said Ozaki. "You can never give enough timely, accurate and insightful information, and it takes a real focused effort to communicate it so that it is correctly used."

Ozaki says there is often the need to translate between the requests and needs of those in Washington and the information provided by individuals and programs at INL.

"What seems to be a simple and obvious request from Washington is sometimes misinterpreted by lab folks and results in the wrong product being delivered," said Ozaki. "As the NE program goes, I think DOE will ask INL for more and better long-range planning and prioritization of needs so their budget requests can have the greatest impact on the administration's goals for energy programs."



***In D.C., Ozaki worked for Dennis Miotla, deputy assistant secretary for Nuclear Power Deployment and interim manager of DOE's Idaho Operations Office.***

In Washington, Ozaki worked for [Dennis Miotla](#), the deputy assistant secretary for Nuclear Power



Deployment and interim manager of DOE's Idaho Operations Office. Ozaki said Miotla gave him the access and opportunity to observe and become directly involved in the federal management of DOE programs.

These experiences gave him an insider's view and understanding of how the DOE system works in Washington -- an understanding that will be important now that he's back in Idaho. And his contributions were highly regarded. With his term coming to an end, Shane Johnson, DOE-NE's former principal deputy assistant secretary and chief operating officer, recognized Ozaki for his support to DOE-NE.

***INL's Mike Goff recently began work as the next INL liaison for DOE-NE.***

Ozaki attended congressional hearings and industry meetings to see how the political process works. Ozaki said some of the most memorable and informative events were the House and Senate subcommittee budget hearings on the DOE-NE budgets, [Secretary Chu's](#) Senate confirmation hearing and Idaho industry meetings with the Idaho congressional delegation.

"It's the side of Washington you don't see in the news, the dedication of our elected officials, their staffs and those working for DOE," said Ozaki. "Work days in Washington are incredibly long and weekends quite often turn into more work days."

During the year and a half that Ozaki spent in Washington, a new president was elected, the nation went into an economic crisis and a new DOE administration transitioned. The entire nation had its eyes on Washington while Ozaki was in the middle of it all. Ozaki compared it to being a part of the news as it developed.

"It's as if you're living it real time," he said. "You are constantly being bombarded with information and news."

Ozaki's family experienced history in the making when they attended the inaugural parade. They also traveled to many historic points throughout the greater Washington area and experienced many of the most important places that tie together American history.

"Originally, we were only going to be there for one year — or 52 weekends," said Ozaki. "I told my family to pick their top 50 things they would want to do or see, and on weekends we became tourists."

For his daughters Kimberly and Kristen, the time spent back east was unforgettable as they experienced a life very diverse and different than in Idaho Falls. For Ozaki, the experience working with DOE programs was equally unforgettable. Ozaki said the contacts and relationships he made in Washington would play a large role when he returned to Idaho.

"I see the time spent as a great opportunity for me to make greater contributions to the future of INL, and I appreciate the investment that both INL and DOE have made in me," said Ozaki. "Now it's up to me and my management to maximize the return on this investment."

Ozaki said the biggest challenge of the liaison position will be putting that experience to the best use now that he has returned to INL. It goes back to understanding each other's objectives, expectations and motivations and effectively communicating.

Ozaki said, "We must continually ask ourselves how the lab can most effectively support DOE-NE and continue to pursue our own vision and mission as the nation's lead laboratory for nuclear energy."

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